

a quick consumer guide to

Safe Food Handling

to avoid food poisoning





ever had food poisoning?

actually, it's called foodborne illness.

Perhaps you have had it, but thought you were sick with the flu. Some 76 million Americans will suffer from foodborne illness this year.

Why? Because at the right temperature, bacteria you can't see, smell or taste can multiply to the millions in a few short hours. In large numbers, they cause illness.

It doesn't have to happen, though. Some 85 percent of cases could be avoided if people just handled food properly. Here's what to do...

when you shop ...

Buy cold food last, get it home fast.

- * When you're out, grocery shop last. Take food straight home to the refrigerator. Never leave food in a hot car!
- * Don't buy anything you won't use before the use-by-date.
- * Don't buy food in poor condition. Make sure refrigerated food is cold to the touch. Frozen food should be rock-solid. Canned goods should be free of dents, cracks, or bulging lids which can indicate a serious food poisoning threat.



when you store food ...

Keep it safe, refrigerate.

Check the temperature of your refrigerator with an appliance thermometer you can buy at a variety or hardware store. To keep bacteria in check, the refrigerator should run at 40°F or below; the freezer unit at 0°F. Generally, keep your refrigerator as cold as possible without freezing your milk or lettuce.

- * Freeze fresh meat, poultry or fish immediately if you can't use it within a few days.
- * Put packages of raw meat, poultry or fish on a plate before refrigerating so their juices won't drip on other food. Raw juices often contain bacteria.



when you prepare food...

Keep everything clean & thaw in refrigerator.

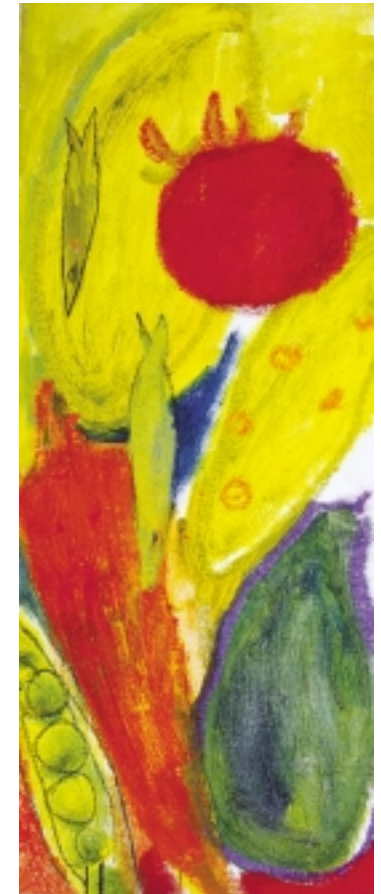
- * Wash hands in hot soapy water before preparing food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets.
- * Bacteria can live in kitchen towels, sponges and cloths. Wash them often. Replace sponges every few weeks.
- * Keep raw meat, poultry and fish and their juices away from other food. For instance, wash your hands, cutting board and knife in hot soapy water after cutting the chicken and before dicing salad ingredients. Sanitize all items regularly.
- * Thaw food in the microwave or refrigerator, NOT on the kitchen counter. The danger? Bacteria can grow in the outer layers of the food before the inside thaws. Marinate in the refrigerator too.
- * Don't prepare food for others when you are sick and have an upset stomach or diarrhea.

when you're cooking ...

Cook thoroughly.

It takes thorough cooking to kill harmful bacteria, so you're taking chances when you eat meat, poultry, fish or eggs that are raw or only partly cooked. When cooking meat, use a thermometer to check that it's cooked all the way through.

- * Cook hamburgers and ground beef mixtures such as meatloaf to 160°F; ground poultry to 165°F.
- * Beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops may be cooked to 145°F; all cuts of fresh pork, 160°F.
- * Whole poultry should reach 180°F in the thigh; breasts, 170°F.
- * Fish is done when it flakes with a fork.
- * Salmonella, a bacteria that causes food poisoning, can grow inside fresh, unbroken eggs. Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm, not runny. Scramble eggs to a firm texture. Don't use recipes in which eggs remain raw or only partially cooked.
- * When you cook ahead, divide large portions of food into small, shallow containers for refrigeration. This ensures safe, rapid cooling.



safe microwaving...

Microwaving sometimes leaves cold spots in food where bacteria can survive. To avoid this:

- * Cover food with a lid or plastic wrap so steam can aid thorough cooking. Vent wrap and make sure it doesn't touch the food.
- * Stir and rotate your food for even cooking. No turntable? Rotate the dish by hand once or twice during cooking.
- * Observe the cooking and standing time called for in a recipe or package directions. During the standing time, food finishes cooking.
- * Use the oven temperature probe or a meat thermometer to check that food is done. Insert it at several spots. Cook to 165°F.

cold storage

These short-but-safe time limits will help keep refrigerated food from spoiling or becoming dangerous to eat. Because freezing keeps food safe indefinitely, recommended storage times are for quality only.

	REFRIGERATOR (40°F)	FREEZER (0°F)		REFRIGERATOR (40°F)	FREEZER (0°F)
eggs			fresh meat (beef, veal, lamb, pork)		
fresh, in shell	3-5 weeks	don't freeze	steaks	3-5 days	6-12 months
raw yolks, whites	2-4 days	1 year	chops	3-5 days	4-6 months
hardcooked	1 week	don't freeze well	roasts	3-5 days	4-12 months
liquid pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes,			variety meats -		
opened	3 days	don't freeze	tongue, brain, kidneys, liver, heart, chitterlings	1-2 days	3-4 months
unopened	10 days	1 year			
mayonnaise			meat leftovers		
commercial (refrigerate after opening)	2 months	Don't freeze	cooked meat and meat dishes	3-4 days	2-3 months
			gravy and meat broth	1-2 days	2-3 months
tv dinners, frozen casseroles			fresh poultry		
keep frozen until ready to serve	3-4 months		chicken or turkey, whole	1-2 days	1 year
			chicken or turkey pieces	1-2 days	9 months
			giblets	1-2 days	3-4 months
deli & vacuum-packed products			cooked poultry, leftovers		
store-prepared (or homemade) egg,			fried chicken	3-4 days	4 months
chicken, tuna, ham, macaroni salads	3-5 days		cooked poultry dishes	3-4 days	4-6 months
pre-stuffed pork & lamb chops,			pieces, plain	3-4 days	4 months
chicken breasts stuffed with dressing	1 day	don't freeze well	pieces covered with broth, gravy	1-2 days	6 months
vegetable or meat added	3-4 days	2-3 months	chicken nuggets, patties	1-2 days	1-3 months
hamburger, ground & stew meats					
hamburger & stew meats	1-2 days	3-4 months			
ground turkey, veal, pork, lamb					
& mixtures of them	1-2 days	3-4 months			
hotdogs & luncheon meats					
hotdogs, opened package	1 week	} in freezer wrap, 1-2 months			
unopened package	2 weeks				
luncheon meats, opened	3-5 days				
unopened	2 weeks				
bacon & sausage					
bacon	7 days	1 month			
sausage, raw from chicken, pork, beef, turkey	1-2 days	1-2 months			
smoked breakfast links, patties	7 days	1-2 months			
hard sausage - pepperoni, jerky sticks	2-3 weeks	1-2 months			
ham, corned beef					
corned beef - drained, wrapped					
in pouch with pickling juices	5-7 days	1 month			
ham, unopened, canned - label says "keep refig."	6-9 months	don't freeze			
ham, opened, canned - label says "keep refig."	3-5 days	1-2 months			
ham, fully cooked - whole	7 days	1-2 months			
ham, fully cooked - half	3-5 days	1-2 months			
ham, fully cooked - slices	3-4 days	1-2 months			

cooking temperatures

Food properly cooked to a high enough temperature will kill any harmful bacteria that may be present

ground meat & meat mixtures	fresh pork
beef, pork, veal, lamb	medium
turkey, chicken	well done
fresh beef, veal, lamb	ham
medium rare	fresh (raw)
medium	pre-cooked (to reheat)
well done	eggs & egg dishes
poultry	eggs - cook until yolk & white are firm
chicken & turkey, whole	egg dishes
poultry breasts, roast	leftovers & casseroles
poultry thighs, wings
duck & goose
stuffing (cooked alone or in bird)



when you serve food ...

Never leave it out over 2 hours.

- * Use clean dishes and utensils to serve food, not those used in preparation. Serve grilled food on a clean plate too, not one that held raw meat, poultry or fish.
- * Never leave perishable food out of the refrigerator over 2 hours! Bacteria that can cause food poisoning grow quickly at warm temperatures.
- * Pack lunches in insulated carriers with a cold pack. Caution children never to leave lunches in direct sun or on a warm radiator.
- * Carry picnic food in a cooler with a cold pack. When possible, put the cooler in the shade. Keep the lid on as much as you can.
- * Party time? Keep cold party food in ice or serve it throughout the gathering from platters from the refrigerator.

Likewise, divide hot party food into smaller serving platters. Keep platters refrigerated until it is time to warm them up for serving.

handling leftovers ...

Use small containers for quick cooling.

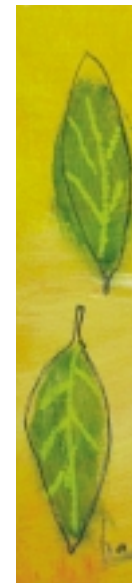
- * Divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator. Don't pack the refrigerator - cool air must circulate to keep food safe.
- * With poultry or other stuffed meats remove stuffing and refrigerate it in separate containers.

reheating

- * Bring sauces, soups and gravy to a boil. Heat other leftovers thoroughly to 165° F.
- * Microwave leftovers using a lid or vented plastic wrap for thorough heating.



Kept it too long?



When in doubt, throw it out.

Safe refrigerator and freezer storage time-limits are given for many common foods in the "Cold Storage" table inside this booklet. But what about something you totally forgot about and may have kept too long?

- * **DANGER** - never taste food that looks or smells strange to see if you can still use it. Just discard it.
- * *Is it moldy?* The mold you see is only the tip of the iceberg. The poisons molds can form are found under the surface of the food. While you can sometimes save hard cheese, salamis and firm fruits and vegetables by cutting the mold out and removing a large area around it, most moldy food should be discarded.



if power is out ...

Your freezer:

Without power, a full upright or chest freezer will keep everything frozen for about two days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen one day.

If power will be coming back on fairly soon, you can make the food last longer by keeping the door shut as much as possible.

If power will be off for an extended period, take food to friends' freezers, locate a commercial freezer or use dry ice.

Your refrigerator/freezer combination:

Without power, the refrigerator section will keep food cool 4-6 hours depending on the kitchen temperature.

A full, well-functioning freezer unit should keep food frozen for two days. A half-full freezer unit should keep things frozen about one day.

Block ice can keep food on the refrigerator shelves cooler. Dry ice can be added to the freezer unit. You can't touch dry ice and you shouldn't breathe the fumes, so follow handling directions carefully.

thawed food ...

Food still containing ice crystals or that feels refrigerator-cold can be refrozen. Discard any thawed food that has risen to room temperature and remained there two hours or more. Immediately discard anything with a strange color or odor.

is it food poisoning?

If you or a family member develop nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever or cramps, you could have food poisoning. Unfortunately, it's not always easy to tell. These symptoms can be caused by illnesses transmitted other ways, such as from person-to-person. Also, the symptoms of food poisoning can appear any time from several minutes to several weeks after eating contaminated food. While most people think their illness comes from the last food they ate, the average time from ingestion until symptoms is 4 to 48 hours.

In more serious cases, food poisoning victims may have nervous system problems like paralysis, double vision or trouble swallowing or breathing.

If symptoms are severe or the victim is very young, old, pregnant, or already ill, call a doctor or go to the hospital right away.

when to report food-borne illness:

You or your physician should report serious cases of suspected foodborne illness to the health department.

Report any food poisoning incidents if the food involved came from a restaurant or commercial outlet.

Give a detailed, but short account of the incident. If the food is a commercial product, have it in hand so you can describe it.

If you're asked to keep the food refrigerated so officials can examine it later, follow directions carefully.





for more information:



Vermont Department of Health
DIVISION OF HEALTH PROTECTION
FOOD & LODGING PROGRAM
863-7221 * 1-800-439-8550